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SUBJECT: Khost Governor Highlights Challenges to Governance and Development

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Khost Governor Arsala Jamal cited corruption and limited human capital as the primary obstacles to good governance in Khost and Afghanistan. While donor projects positively impact private investment, lack of electricity hamper investors. Jamal feared growing Taliban intimidation will lead to low turnout during the upcoming voter registration drive. Jamal criticized the PTS program for its lack of direction, but expressed the opinion that Jalaluddin Haqqani eventually would be reconciled and return to Afghanistan. Finally, Jamal indicated his tenure as governor is nearing its end. END SUMMARY.

Corruption and Limited Human Capital Hamper Good Governance

¶2. (SBU) In a September 26 meeting with USG and COMISAF officials, Governor Jamal singled out limited human capital as the greatest hindrance to developing good governance, both in Khost Province and nationwide. Qualified individuals possessing at least a minimum level of skills and competence are needed, particularly at the critical district level. Jamal highlighted his two critical criteria for district administrators: "one, he is a good guy and two, he is a fighter," meaning someone who is willing to get out in the district and follow through to accomplish things.

¶3. (SBU) Jamal commented positively on the impact of the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG), noting that the institution is improving linkages between Kabul and the provinces, but that it may be expanding into areas beyond its mandate that might result in a loss of focus. He also specified the lack of a discretionary governor's operating budget as an impediment to extending governance and GIROA influence into outlying districts.

¶4. (SBU) Referring to the IDLG draft Sub-national Governance policy, Jamal offered that creating new, parallel consultative bodies and shuras (i.e., community councils) could lead to competition where existing bodies function. For example, the Community Development Councils within the National Solidarity Program have been successful in Khost. He also noted the importance of continuing to support and use traditional forms of governance; e.g., turning to elders for dispute resolution.

¶5. (SBU) Jamal said that corruption at the district administrator level remains problematic; however, he stressed the importance of

Afghan government officials being able to deliver projects and services (even if in most cases, the actual funding originated with the PRT). Jamal stated "if people do not come to you, you are not the government."

Public Projects' Impact on Private Investment

¶6. (U) Khost has the potential to be another Helmand or Mazar, according to Jamal. Relative to other Afghan provinces, Khost enjoys a good climate, a more educated populace, nearby markets and ties to Pakistan, access to capital from remittances from overseas Khosties estimated at USD 10-12 million per month, and an entrepreneurial spirit (which derived in part from the small land-holdings and high cost of land in Khost, requiring investors to look beyond traditional land investments). Jamal underscored the importance of road-building, noting it spurs other construction projects and increases people's confidence in the government. However, the greatest hindrance to productive investment is not publicly-funded projects crowding out private investors, but rather the lack of reliable and sufficient electricity. Additionally, Jamal highlighted the dearth of NGOs operating in the province and expressed support for Coalition efforts to encourage greater humanitarian and development agency presence throughout Khost.

Looking Ahead to Voter Registration

¶7. (SBU) Jamal indicated that "officially" Khost is ready for voter registration, but noted that there are problems in some areas of the province. He said that growing Taliban influence, particularly in Spera, Sabari, and Tani districts, would likely dampen turnout. Interestingly, he did not expect the Taliban to resort to overt force, but rather threats, intimidation, night letters, etc. to prevent people from registering. Jamal believed people do not support the Taliban or want them back in power, but since the people believe the government could not protect them, they would acquiesce to Taliban demands.

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PTS Program Lacks Direction; Haqqani to Return?
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¶8. (SBU) Jamal criticized the Strengthening Peace (PTS) program for its lack of an overall strategy to deal with PTS participants. There exists no social reintegration program or any strategy to use returnees for public diplomacy purposes to encourage others to take part in the program. Jamal expressed the opinion that Jalaluddin Haqqani eventually would be rehabilitated and return to Afghanistan. Jamal said Haqqani has been seen in the past as a moderate, able to unite the mujahedeen and enjoying good relations in Kabul (especially with Burhanuddin Rabbani). Jamal said Haqqani "runs everything in these three (southeastern) provinces, and if he came back, these provinces would be like Panjshir in three years."

End of Jamal's Term as Governor

¶9. (SBU) Jamal confirmed that his two-year appointment as governor was coming to an end and that he had begun making plans to return to Canada soon. We know of no potential successor at this time; Jamal has been an effective administrator and his departure could negatively impact governance in the province.

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